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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 000137

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: MOVING TO THE PRESSURE TRACK ON IRAN: KUWAITIS
VIEW RUSSIAN SUPPORT AS KEY

REF: A. STATE 9124

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 95

[1](#)C. KUWAIT 104

Classified By: DCM Tom Williams for reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action message for the Department,
please see paragraph X.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: Ambassador reviewed February 10 developments in US Iran policy with FM Dr. Shaykh Mohammed Al Sabah, taking the opportunity to note USG concerns about recent high-level Kuwait-Iran exchanges and provocative public remarks by the Iranian ambassador here. The FM said Kuwait has twin goals in its Iran policy - to deliver the GCC message on the necessity of an IAEA-compliant, peaceful nuclear program, and to maintain its friendship with a much larger and more powerful neighbor. Dr. Mohammed suggested that the United States had not spoken clearly enough - to Iran and the region - on whether we are prepared ultimately to do whatever it takes to prevent Tehran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability, but he acknowledged that a reported toughening of Russia's position in support of new sanctions, if confirmed, could be game-changing. Also discussed was pending Kuwaiti assistance to the Palestinian Authority, Yemen, the future US military footprint in Kuwait, and terror financing legislation currently before the National Assembly. End Summary.

IRAN: Kuwait's twin (if contradictory) Iran policy goals

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by DCM, drew from ref a points in discussing evolving U.S. strategy towards Iran, noting our intention to move with the international community towards a "pressure" track given Iranian recalcitrance. (Note: PolCouns also raised ref A points during a January 31 meeting at MFA, reported ref B. End Note.) In that context, she noted recent high-level bilateral visits between Iran and Kuwait had drawn attention and concern in Washington - what was the goal of Kuwait's engagement and could the FM confirm reports that the Amir planned to visit Tehran later in the Spring? Dr. Mohammed responded by saying Kuwait has twin goals in its dealings with Iran: to deliver the international community's message (and that of the GCC) regarding the necessity of IAEA compliance and pursuit of a peaceful nuclear program, and to maintain Kuwait's friendship with Tehran since Kuwait "cannot afford to have Iran as an enemy." Regarding an Amiri visit to Tehran, the FM was vague, saying only that such a trip (despite considerable recent press coverage quoting Iranian sources, including the Iranian Ambassador here, as saying such a trip would happen soon) had been "talked about for ten years."

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador asked if there was consensus within

the GCC on Iran such that a coherent "message" could be delivered? Dr. Mohammed agreed there was a lack of unity. Kuwait favored pursuing a GCC "critical dialogue" with Iran, something that the UAE and Saudi Arabia had not yet accepted and perhaps the timing was not yet right. DCM noted the history of such dialogues was not particularly bright -- the Europeans could probably provide input regarding the marginal utility of their own "critical dialogue" on human rights with Iran - a process that yielded few positive results. Ambassador asked whether recent Iranian delegations had dangled trade carrots (as Parliament Speaker Al-Khorafi had commented privately), including press reports of a possible joint Kuwaiti-Iranian airline intended to help evade future, tougher sanctions; such efforts should be considered carefully given the potential to fall afoul of future "smart sanctions."

IRAN: It's not the audience, it's the message

14. (C) The Ambassador solicited Dr. Mohammed's views on current Iran policy, noting recent press neuralgia (ref C) - and private kvetching from senior Kuwaitis, including Parliament Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi - regarding the US approach, including suggestions the US is not talking to the right Iranians. The FM said the issue from a Kuwaiti perspective wasn't the medium - with governments friendly to the US encircling Iran, and two military conflicts in adjoining states - Afghanistan and Iraq - the US had numerous channels, including intelligence and military conduits, to engage the Iranians, and if all else failed there was always the Swiss interests section. Of greater concern was the

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message being delivered and how it might be interpreted by the regime. The US extending the hand of friendship to Iran - is this viewed as a sign of weakness, perhaps a tacit green light for Tehran to continue on its present course? At the same time, a tougher US line - including any comments on human rights or in support of the opposition -- allowed the regime to continue to use the American bogeyman as its "get out of jail free" card: they simply tell their domestic audience that the issue isn't the international community and the IAEA, but rather the US and its implacable refusal to accept the Iranian revolution.

IRAN: US also disturbed by messaging; Russian support for pressure track would be "game-changer"

15. (C) The Ambassador responded clearly that the US would continue to speak out about human rights issues globally and said our messaging with Iran was mindful of the importance of distinguishing the regime-and in particular the increasingly dominant role played by the Revolutionary Guards in all aspects of Iranian life - from the Iranian people. The U.S. is concerned by recent statements attributed to the Iranian Ambassador here, including his comment to the press that Iran would not need to attack US military facilities here because US warships in the Gulf would provide ample targets. Such statements, if confirmed, were provocative and should be aggressively discouraged by the GoK - the Ambassador laid down the marker that those that perceive the US to be stretched or pinned down should remind themselves of the huge reservoir of human and industrial resources that the United States - a nation of over 300 million citizens and the largest economy on the planet - continues to have at its disposal.

16. (C) The FM commented that CENTCOM Commander Petraeus' public remarks about the US military having plans to attack Iran were also provocative, observing that at the end of the day, governments in the region are asking themselves what the bottom-line of US policy is: with think-tanks in DC suggesting Iranian behavior might actually be more responsible after acquisition of a nuclear weapons

capability, are we all simply going through the motions here?

The Ambassador distinguished between the preparation of contingency plans - to which General Petraeus had clearly referred - and the issuance of threats, and stated that no one should misjudge the seriousness of our concerns regarding a radical government that uses surrogates and proxies to achieve its goals; our tactics with regard to approach should not be confused with the ultimate intent of our strategy. Dr. Mohammed commented that he had been struck by the President's recent optimism regarding the Russian position on Iran, observing that if Moscow is really on board for tougher sanctions, that would be game-changing and create a completely different dynamic for Iran. The Ambassador said she would seek further details from Washington with regard to our assessment of Moscow's position.

Footprint, Yemen, Palestinian Aid

¶7. (C) The Ambassador reviewed for the FM the outcome of the last Joint Military Commission meeting held in late January in Washington, commenting that the Kuwaiti military appeared set in their desire to see a smaller and much more narrowly focused US military presence here in future, and that we were witnessing efforts to change the rules of the game that had heretofore applied to OIF, such as in a desire to charge port fees for ships carrying US military cargo; here the approach should be that we stick with the arrangements previously agreed for OIF until the withdrawal of US combat forces. Did this apparent Kuwaiti military perspective reflect the views of Kuwaiti policy-makers because we have not yet heard this from the senior leadership? (Note: Dr. Mohammed did not respond directly, but on the margins of the meeting indicated a desire to meet privately with the Ambassador to discuss this and other issues. End note.)

¶8. (C) On Yemen, the FM said Kuwait would participate in the "Friends of Yemen" group via the Kuwait Investment Authority, saying the top concern was addressing the perception in Yemen of widespread governmental graft and corruption. Asked if there would be a separate Kuwait-hosted GCC meeting on Yemen in the Spring, the FM implied that no special session would be called, but that the issue would figure prominently at the regularly scheduled mid-year Foreign

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Ministerial.

¶9. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question noting the return of the debts bill to the Parliament, Dr. Mohammed confirmed the GoK still intends to provide \$50 million in budgetary support for the PA via the World Bank Trust Fund, but said such action could not be completed until the parliament had an up or down vote on the returned bill (Note: likely in early March at the earliest. End note.). The Ambassador urged the GoK to act quickly given the enormous needs of the PA and in order to support both Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad while establishing the infrastructure that could sustain a viable Palestinian State in anticipation of a successful outcome of direct negotiations. The FM observed that the GoK had good relations with Abu Mazen and thought highly of Fayyad, but remarked with a shrug that when the former and HAMAS leader Khalid Misha'al had visited Kuwait recently, each had blamed the other for failure to make progress on Palestinian reconciliation.

TF legislation, Trip to the US

¶10. (C) The Ambassador remarked on recent passage by Yemen of terrorist financing legislation, making Kuwait now the lone hold-out in the Arabian Peninsula - a fact that would likely be noted unfavorably during the upcoming FATF Mutual Review. Legislation to criminalize terror financing has been

drafted, but the Ambassador commented that the Parliamentary Speaker had indicated the GoK had not communicated to the parliament that this was a priority or even a goal for the current legislative session, something the Ambassador asked the Gok to take up and correct. Finally, the FM noted his desire to travel to Washington in the May-June timeframe to "coordinate on GCC policy" and said he would welcome suggestions on timing and meetings.

Action Request

11. (C) Post would appreciate any additional information with regard to our assessment of Russia's position on Iran that we may share with the FM.

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